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## **Press Release**

### **African Union convened a Workshop to improve the Handling of Children in Somalia**

**Addis Ababa, 12 December 2014:** The Commission of the African Union (AU) in collaboration with UNICEF and the UN Office of the Special Envoy for Children and Armed Conflict convened a workshop from 11-12 December 2014 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The meeting was attended by the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) represented by officials from the Office of the Presidency and the Ministries of Defense, National Security, Finance, Justice and Constitutional Affairs, as well as the DDR Department and Child Protection Unit, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), representatives from the AU liaison Offices from Sudan and South Sudan, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the United Nations Mission in Somalia (UNSOM).

On behalf of the AU, Dr Tarek A. Sharif, Head Defence and Security Division welcomed participants to the Workshop and stressed that the respective experiences from all the stakeholders present would be critical in taking forward joint efforts for the protection of children formerly associated with armed groups. He also commended the strides taken by the Federal Government of Somalia and AMISOM in stabilization measures undertaken in Somalia whilst ensuring that the rights of children are protected.

The main objective of the workshop was to strengthen the collaboration and improving the process involved in the handling of former child soldiers. It was an opportunity to present the AU guidance documents on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) and to exchange experiences with participants from the AU liaison offices who were experiencing similar challenges in their respective DDR activities, as well as to discuss the operationalization of the Standard Operational Procedure (SoP) which was signed between the FGS and UNICEF on the handling of children.

The meeting identified areas of collaboration aimed at strengthening the capacity of the Federal Government of Somalia and AMISOM as the first contact with disengaging combatants, as well as how to support the CPU and their compliance with the SOP.

The AU Commission remains committed to supporting the Federal Government of Somalia in its efforts aimed at addressing the issue of disengaging combatant's particularly vulnerable groups such as women and children, as part of the Commission efforts towards building the DDR capacity of Member States. The Commission will therefore continue to work closely with its partners in supporting DDR activities and look forward to further collaboration.

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